

Sighting of Van Dam's Vanga *Xenopirostris damii* (Schlegel, 1866) in mangroves in north-west Madagascar

by Lance Woolaver, Rina Nichols, Félix Razafindrajaio & Frank Hawkins

Received 27 April 2003

Van Dam's Vanga *Xenopirostris damii* (Schlegel, 1866) is known from only three locations in Madagascar, where it is endemic (Fig. 1). It is currently classified as Endangered (BirdLife International 2000). The type specimens were collected in 1864 from the Ambazoana River valley (Schlegel 1866), not as usually reported on the Ampasindava Peninsula, but *c.* 50 km further north near Ambaro Bay (Dee 1986). This species has not been recorded in this area since, although there has been little survey effort. Subsequent sightings have been from western Madagascar, where the bird was discovered in 1928 in the old-growth dry deciduous forest of Ankarafantsika, *c.* 450 km to the south-west of the type locality (Lavauden 1932). This site includes the Ampijoroa Forest Station where the species is regularly seen. Van Dam's Vanga has also been recorded in the dry deciduous forest of Analamera in the far north of Madagascar (Hawkins *et al.* 1990).

This note describes the sighting of a single male in a mangrove forest south of the village of Ankazomborona, near the Ampasindava peninsula, *c.* 30 km north-east of the type locality at Ambazoana.

Surveys were carried out in the mangrove *Avicennia marina* forest to the south of the village of Ankazomborona. They took place over five days (116 person hours), between 11 and 24 March 2001, and between 0800 h and 1330 h. Approximately 6 km² (2 x 3 km) was surveyed each day, on foot, such that 30 km² (10 x 3 km) in total was covered by a team of four people.

The bird was seen on 21 March at 1010 h (13°23'S, 48°47'E), *c.* 1.5 km inland from the coast and 30 km north-east of the locality (13°35'S, 48°40'E) where the type specimens were collected in 1864 (Dee 1986).

The vanga was perched on a branch, 2 m above the ground in a mangrove tree. It was gaping slightly and was silent. It was observed for three minutes with binoculars (8 x 42 magnification) from a distance of < 5 m.

The thickness and darkness of the bill were the most immediately striking features. Both the upper and lower mandibles were uniformly dark grey, almost black. The slight terminal hook of the upper mandible was clearly visible. The forehead, crown and ear-coverts were very dark, appearing uniformly black. The mantle, scapulars, back, rump, tail, wing-coverts and flight feathers appeared similarly uniformly black, rather than charcoal-grey as described by Morris & Hawkins (1998), but this could have been because of the strong ambient light. The bright white chin, collar and

belly contrasted with the dark upper plumage. The legs and feet were dark grey. The iris appeared very dark but the exact colour was not determined.

The combination of dark bill and whitish chin and throat eliminates other *Xenopirostris* vangas, whilst the thick bill eliminates Western Tylas Vanga *Tylas eduardi albigularis*. Chabert's Vanga *Leptopterus chabert* is considerably smaller with a short bill and conspicuous blue eye-ring, except in the juvenile which has conspicuous white markings on the wings. There are no other confusion species.

The vanga was seen in mangrove forest consisting entirely of *Avicennia marina* trees 4–6 m tall. The tree in which the bird was perched was on the edge of a small (c.0.5 ha) open lake that was 20–60 cm deep. Similar-sized lakes were scattered throughout the forest. Healthy regeneration of young trees provided a dense undergrowth and complete canopy cover, apart from over the small lakes.

The substrate within the forest consisted of mud covered by 2 to 5 cm of water and was interspersed with a system of small shallow ponds (2–5 m in diameter) joined by small channels. The ponds were rarely deeper than 30–40 cm. The mangrove forest itself was only 2 m above high water. The forest was relatively undisturbed.

This sighting is significant as it represents the only record of Van Dam's Vanga in this area of Madagascar since the type specimens were collected in 1864. It is also the first record of this species in mangrove forest. Previous records suggested that Van Dam's Vanga is restricted to primary dry deciduous forest (Hawkins *et al.* 1990, Langrand 1990, Morris & Hawkins 1998).

Undisturbed mangrove forest along the north-western coast of Madagascar should not be overlooked as potential habitat for Van Dam's Vanga. Our finding of only one individual during our survey suggests that the species is rare in mangroves, similar to Western Tylas Vanga (Hawkins 1995). Nevertheless, if Van Dam's Vanga is utilizing significant areas of the extensive mangrove forest along the north-western coast of Madagascar, its global abundance may be greater than previously thought. Further surveys are clearly needed to confirm its conservation status.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Mr Ndramora and Mrs Begora Françoise for their hospitality during our stay in Ankazomborona. Without the expert guidance of Mr Adazandry Sola dit Zaman'i Ampemba, we would still be lost in the mangroves. We would like to thank Mr & Mrs Laurie Boswell of Nosy Be for their kind help. Richard Lewis and Joanna Durbin provided excellent support from the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust office in Antananarivo. Roger Safford's valuable comments greatly improved a previous draft.

References:

- BirdLife International. 2000. *Threatened birds of the world*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona & BirdLife International, Cambridge, UK.
- Dee, T. J. 1986. *The endemic birds of Madagascar*. International Council for Bird Preservation, Cambridge, UK.
- Langrand, O. 1990. *Guide to the birds of Madagascar*. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven.
- Lavauden, L. 1932. Étude d'une petite collection d'oiseaux de Madagascar. *Bull. Mus. Hist. Paris*. 4: 629–640.

- Hawkins, A. F. A., Chapman, P., Ganzhorn, J. U., Bloxam, Q., Tonge, S. & Barlow, S. 1990. Vertebrate conservation in Ankarana Special Reserve, Northern Madagascar. *Biological Conservation* 54: 83–110.
- Hawkins, A. F. A. 1995. Recent observations of the Western Tylas Vanga, *Tylas (eduardi) albigularis*. *Bull. Afr. Bird Cl.* 2: 13–16.
- Morris, P. & Hawkins, F. 1998. *Birds of Madagascar. A photographic guide*. Pica Press, Robertsbridge.
- Schlegel, H. 1866. List of the most remarkable species of mammals and birds collected by Messrs Fr. Pollen and D. C. van Dam in Madagascar. *Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond.* 1866: 419–426.

Addresses: Lance Woolaver (corresponding author) and Rina Nichols, Wildlife Preservation Trust Canada, 120 King St., Guelph, Ontario, N1E 4P8, Canada, e-mail: lancewoolaver@hotmail.com. Felix Razafindrajao, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, BP 8511, Antananarivo 101, Madagascar. Frank Hawkins, Conservation International, BP 5178, Antananarivo 101, Madagascar.

© British Ornithologists' Club 2004

A previously unidentified museum specimen of Plain-tailed Nighthawk *Nyctiprogne vielliardi* (Caprimulgidae)

by Nigel Cleere

Received 29 July 2003

The Plain-tailed Nighthawk *Nyctiprogne vielliardi* is endemic to the rio São Francisco Valley in north-eastern Brazil and is probably the least known of all Neotropical nightjars (Cleere 1998, 1999, Holyoak 2001). It is also the most recent caprimulgid discovery from South America, two specimens, an adult male holotype and a juvenile male paratype, having been collected near Manga, Bahia in October 1987 and described within the genus *Chordeiles* seven years later (Lencioni-Neto 1994).

The species was next found near Januária, near Mocambinho and near Pirapora in northern Minas Gerais and studied in the field, although no new specimens were collected (Whitney *et al.* 2003). These studies also led to its generic reassignment from *Chordeiles* to *Nyctiprogne*, comments on the whereabouts of the two types and documented the existence of a third, hitherto unidentified museum specimen that was collected near Mocambinho, Minas Gerais in April 1994. The holotype was confirmed as being deposited in the Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo (MZUSP), the paratype was reported as not being held in a public institution and the Mocambinho specimen was recorded from the Laboratory of Ornithology, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). No further localities or specimens are currently known for this taxon.

During an extensive examination of the Caprimulgidae material held in the American Museum of Natural History, New York (AMNH), I located a specimen from the rio São Francisco that matched the description of *Nyctiprogne vielliardi*.